Informational Quality Labeling on Social Media: In Defense of a Social Epistemology Strategy

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> " Social media companies often deploy negative labeling tactically... However, it is also possible to think of information quality labeling strategically... as part of an approach to building a healthy informational environment. "

Informational Labeling

Labeling refers to a content moderation tool that social media companies can use to indicate to users something about the quality of information that appears on their platforms.
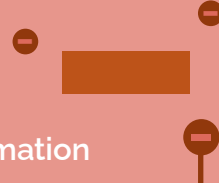
Positive Labeling
indicates to users that the information they are viewing is verified or from a trusted source.

Negative Labeling
indicates to users that the information they are viewing is from an unverified, false, or untrusted source. Social media companies often deploy negative labeling to address a problem only after it arises.

Our Proposal: A Social Epistemology Strategy to Informational Quality Labeling

Information quality labeling will help build a more healthy informational environment if it is not only used to combat misinformation as it arises, but to also advance the informational quality of the overall platform and improve the user's ability to effectively navigate the information ecosystem in the future.

We define "social epistemology" as a multidisciplinary field of inquiry that examines the social aspects of thought, rationality, justification, and knowledge and their normative implications.

An online content moderation strategy that is grounded in the lens of social epistemology would improve and inform informational quality labeling in the following ways:

Consistency and coherence: There is overall a lack of coherence in the discourse and practice around content moderation – it is difficult to argue what works, what does not, and what is acceptable when the end goal is not at all clear. We propose clearly articulating the ultimate goals (and the values that justify them) of the moderation regime.

Understanding harms: A social epistemic approach to content moderation helps to more fully characterize the content moderation problem and the associated harms/wrongs involved.

Defining and measuring success: A social epistemology approach favors thinking about success in terms of epistemic impacts systematically, rather than in terms of exposures or access. The question is not how many people see something, but how they are seeing it and the ways in which it leads changes to their epistemic position on information exposure and their views on authority. This paper offers five new measures along these lines for social media companies to consider.

Innovating new strategies: Instead of asking how to slow the spread of misinformation or improve individual critical thinking skills, a social epistemological approach invites exploring strategies that could improve epistemic positions and relationships of users.

Read the full article in the Yale Journal of Law & Technology, Volume 23.